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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses U.S. international schools overseas, addressing the typical American international schools' staff development needs and looking at past and present involvement of U.S. universities in support of these schools. The two major types of overseas schools are those operated by the Department of Defense Dependent Schools system and those operated by for-profit entrepreneurs. Staff development needs include technology education, effective instructional practices for diverse learners, school-community relationships, and school management. Traditionally, the role of U.S. universities in providing services to international schools has been modest. To some degree, universities provide faculty as consultants, assisting with curriculum, technology, mathematics, reading programs, school management, and school board practices. Some universities have offered teacher inservice programs, administrative certification opportunities, graduate courses taught on international school sites, and self-study assistance for initial or re-accreditation. Throughout the development of U.S. international schools, higher education institutions have assumed a variety of roles in support of the schools, particularly through their professorship. Service opportunities available include assuming leadership roles in international school associations, presenting at international conferences, serving on accreditation teams, and consulting internationally in areas of expertise. (SM)

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Running head: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Professional Development Needs of American International Schools Overseas: An Opportunity for Service

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Professional Development Needs of American International Schools Overseas: An Opportunity for Service

International educators are often isolated from professional staff development opportunities regularly available to educators in the United States. The longer this period of relative isolation, the greater the need for professional development that introduces the educator to the latest educational strategies and techniques being used in the United States. The typical length of contract for an expatriate teacher is only 2 years, but there are a significant and growing number of American teachers and administrators remaining overseas for 10, 20, 30, or more years. Many American international schools (independent schools) employ host country and third country nationals as teachers. The presence of "foreign" teachers provides American international schools with an important and valued element of diversity and also offers unique challenges in identifying and meeting these teachers' professional development needs. Non-American teachers may comprise a significant percentage of an international school's instructional staff; however, the percentage varies considerably from school to school. Some schools have a policy of only employing U.S. certified teachers. The international school administrator's professional development needs must also be considered. Robert Simpson, policy consultant for the Association for the Advancement of International Education and American overseas schools, has observed that "numerous international educators have said that their experiences in overseas schools were never addressed by books on educational administration" (Simpson, 2000, p. 1). This statement has implications for administrator staff development;

however, it begs the question as to international school teachers' preparation and staff development needs.

This paper introduces the "world" of international education, specifically, American international schools overseas. Addressed are the typical American international school's staff development needs and past and present involvement of American universities in support of American overseas schools. It concludes by offering suggestions on how professors can become actively involved by assisting American international schools meet their professional development needs.

Introduction to American Overseas Schools

Two major types of American overseas schools exist: schools operated under the direction of the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS) system, described as "dependent" and "independent," which includes schools assisted by the U.S. Department of State Office of Overseas Schools, multinational companies, expatriate communities, and those operated for profit by entrepreneurs. In addition, there are some American international schools that have a sectarian purpose and therefore receive support from state-side religious organizations. The number of American overseas schools that enroll U.S. students is somewhere between 700 and 1,000, excluding DoDDS schools. American overseas schools employ an estimated 55,000 educators and enroll 555,000 students (Brown, 2000). American international schools usually operate from one campus and have an enrollment of as little as 100 students or less in remote areas to as many as 2,500 in the largest cities. Accurate school statistics are difficult to ascertain because of the tradition of individualism which

characterizes communities of Americans overseas, importance placed on local control, and the fact that these schools are not required to register with the U.S. government. American international schools, or "Independent" schools, are truly international and multicultural in make-up when compared with DoDDS "dependent" schools because they typically enroll students from a variety of countries. DoDDS schools take on the characteristics of a state-side school transplanted into a U.S. military environment in a foreign country.

Public school districts and schools in the United States have a significant degree of local control but are influenced greatly by state and federal regulations. By comparison, American international schools have a greater degree of independence from outside influences (Brown, 2000). Stakeholders of American international schools typically have significant influence and participate to a much greater extent in matters of school governance than in American public schools. In fact, many American international school bylaws require stakeholder participation. Despite the independence characterizing American international schools, they look like most state-side schools in that they share common curricular elements, use textbooks from publishers from the U.S., offer extracurricular programs, and teach classes in English. This is due to American parents wanting their children to receive as similar a school experience as they would "back home" and many non-American parents recognizing the benefits of receiving an "American" education (Chesley, 2000).

American international schools are always subject to foreign government regulation (Brown, 2000). The laws of the host nation must be followed even if they

conflict with the school's mission. Some countries require that the international school teach in the host country "official" language while others may regulate who may teach and require teacher preparation not found in U.S. schools of education. Host government requirements may exist for American international school board minutes, financial records, official reports, and all official public meetings to be in the host language. In addition, the host country labor laws, health restrictions, legal holidays, and required vacations must be adhered to. In some countries, there are age restrictions for obtaining a work visa. American international schools must also be incorporated under host government law to conduct business, hire employees (local and import), open bank accounts, purchase supplies, and rent, own, or build facilities. Most American international schools are nonprofit or not-for-profit. Some countries will not recognize that status; therefore, they are required to pay taxes on property, tuition, and utilities. Some American international schools are incorporated in the United States because of certain legal and financial benefits. There may be occasions where U.S. laws may be in conflict with host nation laws. Local laws may dictate the composition of the school board, typically referred to as the "Board of Directors" overseas.

To most American international schools overseas, state-side regional accreditation is important. Most schools do seek programmatic approval from the U.S. accreditation agency serving their region of the world. However, American international schools take pride in their independence and value the fact that no U.S. legal authority can require that they conform to American standards. American accreditation can restrict an American international school's autonomy as it relates to curricula,

philosophy, extracurricular programs, and budgets; but accreditation associations typically make some allowances recognizing difficulties inherent overseas. State-side accreditation requires: academic programs taught in English; teaching staff using American methodology; opportunities for creative expression; strong extracurricular programs; and transferability of academic work to the United States and other American international schools.

There are a variety of voluntary, nongovernment organizations that support American overseas schools and assist them in resolving governance needs. One such organization is the Association for the Advancement of International Education (A.A.I.E.) which is a world-wide association benefitting overseas American and international schools. This association holds its annual meeting in the United States and includes sessions of interest to international school heads and board members. The association publishes the A.A.I.E. quarterly journal *Inter Ed* with features of interest to membership (Grell, 2000). In addition, there are 15 regional associations designed to unite American schools in various regions of the world.

Staff Development Needs

A review of recent literature revealed limited information on what American international schools perceive as their needs with regards to staff development. However, the authors reasoned that a relatively "good" understanding could be gleaned from an "informal" survey by Bronack, Hobson, and White requesting international school directors to identify their professional development needs (Hobson, 2000). In addition, the authors of this paper drew upon their combined 30 years of experience as

American international school administrators and teachers in urban and rural settings in Latin America.

Hobson (2000) identified technology as one of, if not the most critical staff development needs at American international schools. Specific technology needs include helping teachers to integrate technology into teaching content and relating student learning to understanding technology as a retrieval tool for information. Administrators are concerned about understanding strategic planning as it relates to technology and information/strategies in addressing technical support, hardware, and software. How to hire and what to look for in hiring competent technology support staff was also a priority. Strategic planning at American international schools can be complicated because student enrollment is an all-important, difficult to control factor. Student enrollment is made difficult to predict because of uncontrollable national and international politics and economic factors that influence it and, therefore, school operating funds. Most American international schools operate entirely from tuition and fees. The availability of knowledgeable computer service technicians, especially in remote locations, has been a significant ongoing problem for many American international schools. This problem has forced many international school heads when recruiting for a technology teacher to place considerable importance on a candidate's "technician" expertise. Lastly, American international school educators have an ongoing desire and need to acquire and maintain current knowledge of technological issues and trends.

American international schools are "private" schools and as such give "special"

importance to school/lcommunity relations. These schools usually have many nationalities represented within the school community, typically including Americans, host country nationals, and "third country" nationals. Twenty to 60 nationalities may be represented within the school population, each parent and nationality having a vision of what is "good education," a vision influenced by experience and nationalistic values. This variety of expectations presents a considerable cultural and school/community relations challenge for American administrators and teachers. These expectations can also present a challenge for host country and third country teachers on staff. While American public school systems and educators recognize the importance of school-community relations, the authors of this paper suggest that American international schools typically place more importance to it. An effective school-community relationship is an important factor in an American international school's continued existence. Given the changing demographics of American international schools, the importance of school-community relations will continue to remain a pressing issue requiring greater staff development and attention. School administrators need to be presented with effective school-community relations strategies, including how to promote relations within the school as well as the local community.

A greater understanding of effective instructional practices for diverse learners has been identified as a need to be addressed through staff development (Hobson, 2000). Probably few schools in the United States have the diversity of students, parents, and teachers that characterizes many American international schools. As a case in point, the authors' of this paper most recent international school administrative

assignment was in Venezuela at a school that had 40 student nationalities and teachers from 14 countries. Under these conditions, understanding and using the most appropriate instructional practices for the diverse learner becomes a school necessity. American international school staff must understand and appreciate cultural and language diversity issues. When school staff truly supports and appreciates diversity, they influence the student towards exhibiting a positive attitude towards the host culture (Luebke, 1969). Many American international schools are relatively small by U.S. standards (less than 200 students) and may experience difficulty meeting all of the educational expectations and services demanded by parents. For example, some schools cannot afford to offer special education services and, therefore, have a policy of not enrolling students with severe learning and physical handicaps.

Issues of school management can also be addressed through staff development. School heads need assistance with budget issues and basic financial planning (Hobson, 2000). Brown (1988) wrote that

> the financing of American international schools requires an approach which has little precedent in the organizational structure of its typical counterpart in the United States. The unique conditions under which American international schools function require accounting practices, financial planning and resource applications similar to those of private local commercial organizations and that the rigid adherence to the standards by which U.S. public and private schools operate may not be appropriate to meeting the volatile and unusual conditions that characterize international schools. (p. 54)

More and more American international schools are finding it difficult to operate solely from tuition and fees. Increasing tuition is not always possible because of increasing competition and the economic crises presently being experienced throughout the world. Compounding this financial dilemma, the needs of American international schools have increased over time rather than decreased. Education is dynamic, and American international schools experience intense pressure from the school community to be on the cutting edge. Schools are expected to constantly update facilities, expertise, and infrastructure. American international schools typically have a mobile school community which makes it difficult to establish a stable base of students who can be counted upon to meet the school's basic financial needs. Fund raising for some schools has become a fiscal necessity that has been made more difficult because there typically has been little or no history of giving (Horsley, 1999). American international schools through necessity have tuition up to $20,000 or more per year. A standard parental complaint might be, "I already pay extremely high fees. Why should I now be expected to give more?"

Higher Education Involvement

Traditionally, the role American university played in providing services to American international schools has been modest. When universities participated, they usually provided assistance in staff development and conducting of research. Recently, higher education's association with American international schools has become more pronounced, but still the number of universities that are participating is still relatively small. To a limited degree, universities are providing faculty as consultants, assisting

with curriculum, technology, mathematics, reading programs, school management, and school board practices. Some universities have presented teacher inservice programs, administrative certification opportunities, graduate courses taught on international school site, and self-study assistance for initial or reaccreditation. Few universities offer complete graduate degree programs at overseas sites. The U.S. Department of State through the Office of Overseas Schools has awarded grants and supported programs for instructional improvement, acquisition of technology, accommodation of special needs students, curriculum development, and university graduate programs. The Office of Overseas Schools has supported University-to-School Programs designed to assist American international schools in addressing inservice needs such as technology. Universities have taken advantage of their participation with international schools to conduct research and participate in field service opportunities. It is not unusual for a state-side school and university to cooperate with an American international school in support of its staff development program.

The Association for the Advancement of International Education (A.A.I.E.) was founded in 1966 to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas promoting intercultural and international education and to provide services in meeting the needs of American/international schools world-wide. This association is recognized as the umbrella organization nurturing international schools abroad through developing links with schools and universities in the United States. The organization boasts among its membership many American international school heads, active/retired international school administrators, and a growing number of university professors and

administrators. Over the last 20 years there has been a decline in involvement of higher education institutions in A.A.I.E.. The university involvement that does remain and is increasing tends to be among the professorship. Individual professors continue to serve as American international school consultants, regularly present at the A.A.I.E. annual conference, and present and participate at regional international school association meetings held throughout the world. The decline in actual university participation may have been due to budget cuts, limited resources available for international endeavors, and the perception among some university administrators that international involvement is little more than junkets for professors.

Smith and Gordon (2000) made the interesting point "that while colleges of education are sometimes held in low regard, members of faculties are not. Professors continue to be identified internationally as sources of valuable assistance" (p. 226). Present involvement of professors tends to be primarily entrepreneurial in nature as compared to the institutional commitment of the past. Several possibilities for the "drifting apart" between universities and the international school, other than financial, include:

1. Lack of interest and/or knowledge of American international schools among university administration.

2. Difficulty of providing degree programs abroad because of the need to hire outside faculty.

3. Complicated institutional approvals, i.e., residency requirements, recognition of degrees from foreign universities, and general admissions requirements.

4. Difficulty in contacting overseas international educators to inform them of the program availability.

Service Opportunities

Throughout the development of American international schools, higher education institutions, particularly through their professorship, have assumed a variety of rolls in support of American international schools overseas. Significant opportunities presently exist for individual professors and, indeed, colleges and universities to leave the American shores and take on a new form of leadership. This presents an opportunity to make a significant educational difference overseas, enriches university state-side offerings, and provides opportunities for professional service for the professorship. The authors of this article suggest, in addition to institutional and individual membership in A.A.I.E., the following possibilities to that end through:

1. assuming a leadership role in an international school association;
2. presenting at international school conferences;
3. serving on accreditation teams;
4. serving as a school accreditation consultant;
5. consulting internationally in area(s) of expertise;
6. participating and presenting at individual school staff development programs;
7. participating and presenting at regional association conferences;
8. publishing articles in newspapers and journals serving the international school community;

9. sponsoring university "summer" inservice activities tailored towards international educators;

10. offering certification and degree programs that meet the unique needs of international educators;

11. sponsoring international school teacher and administrator recruiting fair(s).

In conclusion, international educators typically take great pride in their accomplishments both professionally and personally. At times they live and work under difficult and unique circumstances, all within a culture that is often quite different from their own, and in this they also take pride. It is important that those who desire to assist overseas schools first take the time to understand the international educator's motivation/needs and the unique characteristics and needs of American international schools abroad. In short, the first step in providing effective staff development, as in preparing a good presentation, is to "know your audience."

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